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RECOLLECTIONS OF STEPHEN F. AUSTIN¹

GEORGE L. HAMMEKEN²

San Luis, February 28th 1844

Dear Guy,

In answer to yours of the 8th inst., respecting what I know of your uncle, I am sorry to say, that after much reflection on the subject, I can afford you but little information of the kind you desire—such as it is, I communicate—but if led to speak too much of myself, you must rather attribute that to a wish to

¹This article is printed substantially as written, with slight changes in punctuation.

²I have been able to find but little concerning George Louis Hammecken; that little indicates that he was a man of some importance in business and public affairs. He was, perhaps, a native of New York; went to Mexico about 1831, and there made the acquaintance of Stephen F. Austin about the middle of the year 1833. He came to Texas in October, 1835, as the agent of English bankers to place loans with some planters; the revolution interfered with these plans. He does not appear to have participated in the revolution, for early in January, 1836, he was in New Orleans, and about the end of February he was in the City of Mexico. By June he was once more in New Orleans, again met Austin there, and accompanied him to Texas. He soon proceeded to New York, returning to Texas by December. It is probable that he became a resident about this time. In 1837 he translated Filisola's *Defense*. On January 2, 1839, he addressed a letter to President Lamar, expressing the opinion that conditions in Mexico were favorable to peace, and requesting to be appointed one of the commissioners, or secretary to the commissioners, to negotiate with Mexico. He was appointed secretary to Barnard E. Bee, Texan agent to Mexico, March 12, 1839. Since Bee could not speak Spanish and was entirely unfamiliar with the people and customs of Mexico, the position of secretary involved much responsibility. Bee's mission did not succeed, and when James Webb was sent to make another effort to open negotiations, Hammecken was appointed his secretary, April, 1841. I have been unable to ascertain what Hammecken's business was up to 1840. In that year Andrews & Hammecken are engaged as commission merchants at San Luis. In the winter of that year they erected a cotton press capable of compressing seventy-five bales of cotton in twelve hours. They possessed large warehouses and an excellent wharf. Hammecken, too, was president of the Brazos and Galveston Railroad Company, with such well known Texans as David G. Burnet, Lorenzo Zavala, Asa Brigham, and Moses Austin Bryan among the stockholders. Within less than a year after writing the reminiscences here printed he was overwhelmed by misfortune. In a letter of January 7, 1845, Guy M. Bryan said, "Mr. Hammekin has been for some time crazed; he is now in N Orleans. I think his difficulties here, in finances, etc., brought it upon him. I regret this extremely for he was a noble generous kind-hearted man."—E. W. W.

define causes than to egotism. You will therefore destroy whatever appears extraneous to your object.

My acquaintance with your uncle commenced in the City of Mexico, at the time he went there to get Texas admitted as a State.³ I was then residing on a Hacienda (a large Farm or Plantation) distant about 14 miles from the City. This Hacienda belonged to Mr. James S. Wilcocks, Consul General of the United States. I rented from him an undivided half of his Estate, we kept house and lived together on the most amicable terms. Mr. Wilcocks was a friend of Genl. Austin's, and through him I became acquainted, and afterwards on terms of intimacy and friendship with your uncle, who would occasionally ride out and stay a few days with one or the other of us.

I can recollect very well, that during one of these rides out to the Hacienda, your uncle observed to me in words of the following import, "Hammeken, I never advise any one to go to Texas, but I would like *you* to see that country. You are of the right age to grow up with a country." My reply to him in substance was, "that in order to be a Texian, I must become a Mexican Citizen, and that no pecuniary interest would tempt me to that." This by the by was an improper remark, because *he* was a Mexican Citizen,—but my youth and thoughtlessness were the cause. I added, "if Texas ever becomes Independent, then Colonel, perhaps you will see me there." He replied "Pshaw! By the time you are as old as I am, you will think differently." Whether his remark was intended for the former or latter of my observations I cannot tell.

We had more conversation respecting the Independence of Texas at the same time, but I cannot remember either his observations, or my own—these things now seem to me almost as a dream—when you awake, you can recollect the subject of your dream, but cannot call to mind the particulars.

At the time Col. Austin was endeavoring to get Texas admitted as a State, I heard, from whom I cannot now tell, whether from himself, Mr. Wilcocks, or some other friends, that besides other embarrassments which he experienced, were the intrigues of Anthony Butler, the *mis*-representative of the American Peo-

³This was in the summer of 1833.

ple at Mexico,⁴ John T. Mason⁵ and others—who wished to have Texas declared a Territory, with a view to its being subsequently sold to the United States. This, your uncle opposed; not, I believe, from any aversion to belonging to the United States, but being better acquainted with Mexican character than those gentlemen he knew that instead of the Mexican Government selling Texas, their jealousy and suspicion would be aroused, and would retard the progress of his Colony. For this reason, he declared himself on all occasions, opposed to being one of the United States, and always in conversation seemed to seek for arguments why it was the interest of Texas rather to form a State of the Mexican Federation, than to become one of the United States. He well knew, that if he joined Butler, Mason, and others, in their efforts to make Texas declared a Territory, that he would, as I have observed, arouse the jealousy and suspicion of the majority of the Mexican Statesmen. I will here mention a remark he made to me in New Orleans in January, 1836,⁶ “Hammeken, if *they* had let me alone, I would have had 200,000 inhabitants in Texas, before attempting a separation from Mexico.” Who *they* referred to I cannot tell.

It is essential, to elucidate one of the main questions of your uncle's life, that all possible light should be thrown on his *ulterior* views with regard to Texas. His foresight, for which he was remarkable, arising from the good sense which was the principal ingredient of his character, must have led him to the conclusion that at some future time two races, so dissimilar in every point of view as are the citizens of the United States and of Mexico, must come into collision, but at the same time he knew that so long as Mexico could be lulled, Texas would advance in strength and prosperity. But alas! it is no new thing for the plans of the wise and prudent to be overthrown by the rash and designing. But, if you make it appear that his *ulterior* aim was to have

⁴Butler was chargé d'affaires of the United States at Mexico from the close of 1829 to December, 1835.

⁵General John T. Mason was agent for the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company of New York. A sketch of him by his granddaughter, Miss Kate Mason Rowland, appeared in THE QUARTERLY, XI, 163-198.

⁶Austin was at this time serving, with Dr. Branch T. Archer and William H. Wharton, as a commissioner from Texas to the United States to solicit aid for the Texas revolution.

Texas become one of the United States, what becomes of his character for fair dealing with regard to Mexico? I think the just solution of the question would be, that so long as Mexico remained true to her compacts, that he would also remain true, and that the violation of the compact by her would absolve him and others. I refer to his speech at Louisville⁷ to prove sufficiently, that Mexico was the first to violate the compact.

Col. Austin left the City of Mexico in ——— of ——— [December 10, 1833]. I was astonished some weeks after to learn that he had been brought back a prisoner and was confined in one of the dungeons of the Ex-Inquisition.⁸ Wishing to see him, I was answered that he was "incommunicado" (not to be spoken with). He was subsequently removed to the Acordada, another prison, where his friends were allowed to see and converse with him. I carried him books, and went to see him as often as I came to town. The situation of a friend in distress would naturally awaken in any one, not destitute of feeling, a desire to relieve him.

The laws with regard to Robbers have seldom been very actively in force in Mexico, since their separation from Spain. I was at the time acquainted (he called himself my friend) with a certain Vicente Saldaña—a bold, daring *Liberal*—always opposed to the Gachupines (old Spaniards). When not engaged in public service, this fellow would carry out his *patriotic* sentiments in private. He assured me, he never robbed a *Liberal*—perhaps because your Democrats are generally of the poorer class.

Don Vicente would occasionally honor me with his company at breakfast or dinner on my Farm, and if in a hurry would leave me a tired horse, and take a fresh one from my stable—which to do him justice he always returned. This though he did not do with small amounts of cash which he would sometimes condescend to *borrow*. In [1833] he with some of his band, conducted Zavala with safety to the coast, and on another occasion had accompanied me a considerable distance to recover a very valuable horse that was stolen from my partner Mr. Wilcocks. He

⁷In March, 1836.

⁸He was arrested at Saltillo on January 3, 1834, and reached Mexico on his return February 13.

had a different name, but seemed to be well known in all the little villages through which we had occasion to pass.

I believe that *uncertainty* was the greatest torture Col. Austin endured—his mind was too great to be affected by the comparatively trifling inconveniences of want of exercise and bad diet. At one time it was currently reported that he was to be banished for Ten years to California. I told him whilst he was in the Acordada what an invaluable *friend* I had possessed in Vicente Saldaña, and that he could be depended upon. The room in which Col. Austin was confined had a window with a small balcony projecting over the street. Almost beneath this window is the principal entrance to the Acordada, before which a Sentinel was constantly placed, and immediately at hand were placed the arms of 10 or 15 soldiers, who were generally lounging around, during the day—at night every thing appeared quiet, except the solitary sentinel.

I explained my plan to your uncle, which as well as I can recollect was this—that on some dark night, he should slip down from the balcony by a rope, that my friend Vicente would be at hand, and I would have horses near the prison, and we could be off before they could see in which direction we went. The Acordada is on the outskirts of the city, and near to it is the principal Promenade at the end of which several roads fork in different directions. Colonel Austin approved my plan, but remarked that he would not attempt to escape in that way, as long as he had a chance of getting clear, but as soon as he could ascertain that his cause would be determined on unfavorably, we would then try it. I never mentioned these things to any one living—not even to my partner Wilcocks, nor to Saldaña. I told him merely that I had a good job for him in view, and to report himself as constantly as possible—he did so [so] constantly, that when your uncle's prison was changed I was glad to get rid of him.

This new prison is called the Diputacion, and is situated in front of the Public Square, in the heart of the City. He was there confined, at the time Grayson and Spencer Jack arrived,⁹

⁹On October 15, 1834, Peter W. Grayson and Spencer H. Jack arrived in Mexico to solicit on behalf of the Texans Colonel Austin's release. Grayson's account of their mission is in *THE QUARTERLY*, XI, 155-163.

in a secluded apartment, which would prevent our carrying out my plan with regard to the Acordada.

The greatest cause of delay in the trial arose from the difficulty of ascertaining which Judge should try his cause. The processes in Mexico are carried on in writing—the papers are stitched together as the cause proceeds—this forms one or more volumes, which are called the Expediente. His expediente was carried to a Judge who after keeping it in his possession for a long time would decide that it did not belong to his Jurisdiction, and that such a Judge ought to try it, who again would act in the same way. All this I think was ordered by the Government, who probably aware that there was not sufficient cause to condemn attained their object by this manoeuvring.

Gomez-Farias, Vice-president, was performing the duties of President, during the absence of Santa Anna from the Capital. He is no doubt one of the most disinterested Liberals in Mexico, but is at the same time as obstinate and stubborn as a mule. Whether influenced by others, or from his native jealousy of the citizens of the United States, I know not, but there is no doubt he believed he was serving his country by detaining Col. Austin in prison.

After his removal to the Diputacion, a general amnesty law for all *political* offences passed the Mexican Congress, and if I mistake not Colonel Austin's liberty was procured on account of this measure.¹⁰

Mr. Wilcocks was the guardian of two Mexican young ladies residing with their mother in the city. I was very intimate with this family, and introduced your uncle to them before he was imprisoned. He was particularly pleased with one of them, and went frequently to the house—he became a favorite not only with the family, but also with their immediate neighbours and friends. Among the latter, was a very sprightly young lady whose family had influence with Santa Anna. This young lady contributed both to his being set at liberty by giving bail, and subsequently to his final freedom. Not having it in his power to evince his gratitude by any important acts, your uncle endeavored by many

¹⁰He left the City on July 13, 1835, and returned to Texas by way of Vera Cruz and New Orleans, reaching Texas on September 1.

little attentions to make this lady and the family some return to manifest that he was sensible of the interest they had taken for him. Neither of these families were rich, therefore could not afford those extravagances which are so prized by young ladies of all nations. For the first time, an aeronaut was going to make an ascension and nothing else was talked of in Mexico—but the high price of a Ticket (I think \$20) put it out of the power of many to witness it. I accompanied Colonel Austin to take a Box for the use of these ladies and their friends—on the way we conversed about different men, among others of Anthony Butler. With much warmth he remarked to me that “Butler had been the principal cause of his detention”—he did not tell me in what way, nor have I ever learned. Whether Butler’s motive was private dislike, or whether he considered Col. Austin as an impediment to his schemes, I do not know—most likely, both. Butler was also a visitor, and on friendly terms with the family to which I have alluded. Mr. Wilcocks at a subsequent period represented to his government that he, Butler, had made proposals of marriage, although at the time he had a wife living in the United States, to the same young lady, for whom Col. Austin shewed some preference, which fact was probably known to Austin, and contributed to his contempt for that base man.

I cannot call to mind any other little circumstance, that could possibly interest you, during my acquaintance with your uncle in Mexico. We lived, when I went to the City, in the same house which was rented by our common friend Capt. Washington W. West—who was also devoted to your uncle. When Centralism was talked of, West observed “well, Colonel, of course you will be Duke of Texas”—and Duke was his appellation in the correspondence which I afterwards held with West, and in the private intercourse of us three. Col. Austin was cautious and prudent, and therefore but seldom spoke of the politics of the different parties of Mexico. When he could serve a friend, however, he would lay aside his caution and prudence. Our friend West had got into a difficulty with two Mexican Officers—one of them a Colonel—they sent a file of men to take West, and forced an entrance into the house. West escaped. This happened towards the close of the day. Notwithstanding the delicacy of his situa-

tion, and the risk of making enemies of the Military, he did not hesitate in efforts to serve West, but continued up that evening till past 12 o'clock, and renewed his efforts the following day.

I have heard some of his opponents in Texas accuse him of a want of firmness and decision. In my intercourse with, and in whatever I could learn of him, wherever a proper construction was placed on his motives and actions, his conduct was decidedly firm and decisive, but most men are too apt to judge of others conduct only as affecting their own interests—making no allowances for circumstances. Colonel Austin would probably listen with all patience to the communications and suggestions of those around him—sometimes, their opinions might coincide with his own; and if he acted in accordance with those opinions, his enemies would cry out “he did so, because such a one advised him.”

Our friend West accompanied him on his way to Vera Cruz as far as Jalapa. The Stage was frequently at that time robbed between Mexico and Jalapa. On West's return, I asked him how they got on. He answered me “very well, I told the Duke that if we were attacked I meant to fight. ‘So do I, says the Duke,’ and nothing more was said on the subject, as we understood each other.”

General Barragan had travelled through the United States with Capt. West, and on his return to Mexico came frequently to West's house—where I became acquainted with him. After Farias was put down by Santa Anna's turning from the Liberal Party, Barragan, during the absence of Santa Anna from the Capital, exercised the functions of President. I went to the Palace occasionally to see him—this was in 1835—before and after your uncle left Mexico.

I saw General Austin in New Orleans in January, 1836, and walking with him one day in Canal Street I asked him, if he did not think it would be better to pay Mexico — millions, than to expend money and blood in perhaps a fruitless strife; or words to that effect. At the same time I offered, if he approved of the plan, on my return to Mexico, to see Barragan about it.

General Austin did not hesitate a moment in expressing himself strongly—he said he could give me no *official* authority, but

that if such a thing could be brought about, he would use his influence as far as possible, and he did not doubt that it could be effected, if arranged before blood was shed in Texas.

I shortly after returned to Mexico—but unfortunately found that General Barragan was on his death-bed—which frustrated the whole scheme. Barragan was benevolent and humane and was said to have possessed considerable influence with Santa Anna. He had travelled and was very well informed. He had a very high opinion of Americans.

I mention this circumstance to shew that the object which Houston and Lamar have endeavored to obtain, i. e. purchasing peace from Mexico, was originally one of Genl. Austin's measures. I repeated our conversation to Peter W. Grayson, who told me afterwards that he had spoken to Houston, and that the measure could be carried through, if Mexico would assent. I mentioned it likewise to Lamar, who also adopted the policy of your uncle, and in fact the friendly offices of England have no doubt been obtained in a great measure by the holders of Mexican Bonds, to whom the amount was to have been paid.¹¹ I saw General Austin again in New Orleans in June, 1836. He had heard previously of Barragan's death. We came out to Texas together in the Pilot boat Union—afterwards when a Privateer, called the Terrible. I remained in Texas but a short time, during which I can remember he went up to [Orozimbo] to see Santa Anna. I rode from Brazoria with him on his return to Mr. Perry's,¹² where I copied sundry letters for him—of which you ought to have copies, as they contain matter of interest—addressed to President Jackson and to General Gaines—enclosed in the one to Jackson, was a letter from Santa Anna to Jackson.¹³

Having been absent from home for five years, I went to New York, and returned in December, 1836, and shortly after went up to Columbia where I found General Austin on a sick bed.

"Well, Hammeken, I am glad to see you. What do you think

¹¹During the summer of 1843 Mexico and Texas through the assistance of the British representatives in the respective countries arranged an armistice to treat for peace. The Texan government was entirely willing to assume five million dollars of the Mexican public debt, most of which was owing to English capitalists.

¹²James F. Perry, Austin's brother-in-law, and the step-father of Guy M. Bryan, to whom this letter was written.

¹³Copies of all these papers are in the Austin Collection of the University of Texas.

of going about? We'll give you some place in the government, and I'll let you have some of my stock—they say, it will be very valuable." I replied to him, "that I did not want any place—that in Mexico he had told me his private affairs were greatly deranged in consequence of his attention to public matters, and that if he chose, I would aid him in arranging his own affairs." He then said, that it would suit him exactly, and that when he got better we would talk more about it.

I continued with him from that time (the afternoon of Friday, Dec'r 23d) until his death, which occurred on Tuesday the 27th.

He was taken with a severe cold about a week before his death, but such a cold would not be a cause of fear, as the physicians assured me, in a person of sound constitution. I found him somewhat stupefied from the effects of the opium they had given him, and conversed but little with him that evening. On the following morning (Saturday) he appeared much relieved, and told me that it gave him satisfaction to converse. The next day was Christmas (Sunday) he seemed so much better that Capt. Henry Austin,¹⁴ who was the only friend I found with him, advised him to be shaved and have his linen changed, and brought him out of the little room where his bed was (which room was enclosed with clapboards, very open and without a fire-place or stove) and placed him on a pallet before the fire. This was in the morning—the weather was very mild and pleasant. About 10 o'clock a strong norther came on, and it turned very cold—we put him to bed again, at his request.

Shortly after he was in bed two papers were brought to him for his signature—one of which Capt. Austin read; the other I read—after finishing it, I observed to Capt. Austin, "he must not sign this"—"nor this either," replied he. "Go in and tell him so." I went in to the little room, and said to him, "General, they have brought you two papers to sign, which Capt. Austin and myself agree you ought not to sign, at least in your present condition." He asked me, "What is the nature of them." I told him that they would compromise his whole estate, and further remarked that I did not recollect ever asking a favor from him, but that now I would take it as a great favor if he would

¹⁴Stephen F. Austin's cousin.

not at that time sign these papers—"Well," says he, "I won't sign them." I immediately went out and told the bearer, Dr. Archer, that General Austin by the advice of his friends would not at that time sign papers of so much importance as to compromise his whole estate. The Doctor remarked "It is no more than I have done. I have compromised *my* whole estate, and he must either sign or relinquish his interest."

I told General Austin of his words, and observed that I was sure no pecuniary object had induced him to enter the association. "Let them draw out the relinquishment" was his only reply, for he was very weak, and conversed apparently with effort. This relinquishment he signed that same day—he got much worse towards evening.

The following morning (Monday) I sent for Mr. Perry. In the afternoon Dr. Levi Jones and Dr. Leger (one an American the other a French Physician) held a consultation and differed—they referred to me. Dr. Jones wished to administer an Emetic, which Dr. Leger opposed. Dr. Jones observed, that if he did not take it he would die in two hours. He was so exhausted, that his strength failed him when he wanted to throw up the phlegm. Dr. Leger replied, that the exertion, if the Emetic should be given, would kill him, but did not suggest any way to get rid of the phlegm, which momentarily increased the difficulty of his respiration. In this situation I had no alternative,—if he did not take the Emetic, he would certainly die, although his life might, by not taking it, last a few hours more. I therefore requested Dr. Jones to give him the Emetic and whilst it was preparing Dr. Leger observed to me "You are right. I have changed my opinion within the last few minutes—it is now his only chance."

They commenced with ipecac, which failed to produce any other effect than to make him strain and weaken himself still more—they then gave him Tartar Emetic, which had the desired effect. He breathed easier but his strength was almost entirely gone. The Doctors were very anxious that he should get a little sleep, but he passed the night without closing his eyes for a moment. He would at times leave his bed and sit on a chair with his arms resting on a small table before him, with his head

buried in his arms. This position seemed to be more agreeable to him than the bed, but his weakness would not allow of this for a long time—he rose and laid down several times during the night, which he passed in the room adjoining his bed room on a pallet before the fire.

At day break Mr. Perry and Austin Bryan¹⁵ arrived. The General was perfectly sensible, he was indeed so until the last—he immediately recognized them—they were told that there were no hopes. At about nine o'clock A. M. Doctor Leger applied a blister to his breast, and afterwards General Austin observed, "Now, I will go to sleep," and with his left elbow on my leg and his cheek resting on his hand, he seemed to be more at ease. Austin was on his right also supporting him. He would at intervals ask for a little tea, and during one of those intervals uttered his last words in a very faint voice, which were, if not exactly in these words yet the import most certainly was, as heard and distinctly understood both by Austin and myself. "Texas recognized. Archer told me so. Did you see it in the papers?"

In about a half hour afterward he ceased to breathe, in the presence of Mr. Perry, Dr. Archer and Austin Bryan.

Dear Guy,

I have now concluded by melancholy task. If your uncle had been spared for a few years longer, I would, by my attention to his business, probably have learned from himself many particulars relating to his life which would interest you. Those which I possess I have written with much prolixity, in order to help my memory as I proceeded. If you can cull out as many *lines* as I have written *pages*, I shall be most amply repaid. You may rely on the truth of all I have written; for I would not set down that of which I was not positive and certain.

Should I at some future period revisit Mexico, in either a public or private capacity, it will afford me much pleasure to aid you in collecting material for your uncle's life. I left many friends there, and by their influence could have access to many State papers.

Wishing you all success, I remain yours,

GEO. L. HAMMEKEN

¹⁵Austin's nephew.